



Press-Gazette photo by Ken Behrend

Murder mystery: Philip Lee, owner of Lee's Cantonese House, 2237 University Ave., poses outside his business where

a seance will be held Saturday. Lee says he hopes to resolve a murder that took place there 60 years ago.

Spirit from 1930 murder sought in local seance

By Sean Schultz

Press-Gazette

Will the secrets of Lee's Cantonese House disappear with the building when it's demolished?

Owner Philip Lee hopes not.

He wants a resolution to an unsolved murder that took place 60 years ago. He says he wants peace for the troubled spirit whose presence he has sensed in the building since he bought it more than 15 years ago.

And so, in the uneasy hours around midnight Saturday, Lee, a spiritualist, restaurant employees and invited guests will hold a seance. They hope to contact the restless spirit and help him — or her — reveal the truth about what happened exactly six decades ago.

The restaurant at 2237 University Ave. was called The Golden Pheasant then. It was a roadhouse in the former town of

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Preble along State Highway 57. Jack Van Veghel, 36, owned it.

It was business as usual the night of May 20, 1930, when the last of his employees went home, leaving Van Veghel and his 24-year-old waitress Lucille Birdsall, alone.

The next day, a neighbor, Mrs. William DeBroux, watched with uneasiness as a baker, a meter reader and a milkman left the roadhouse door without gaining entrance. The place was too quiet. She sent her son, Martin Verhagen,

next door to check.

As he peered through a window into the bedroom, Martin saw the battered, bloodied heads of Van Veghel and Birdsall.

The police believed that Van Veghel's head was the target. Because of defensive-type wounds on the hands and arms of Birdsall, police theorized that she awakened during the attack and tried to fight.

Both had been hacked to death with a hatchet.

The ground floor doors of the roadhouse were locked. Police saw a trail of blood from the bedroom to a basement door. A slot machine had been smashed open, its money taken, but the cash register still held \$20 and a roll of bills was untouched in the bedroom.

Birdsall's ex-husband, Frank Kupsack, a Milwaukee lather, offered his cooperation to the

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police, knowing he would be suspect. He was cleared. So was a Sturgeon Bay man who had made advances to Birdsall the day before the murders. Rumors were checked out by police, but no weapon was found. No one was charged in the case.

Van Veghel was buried in Alouez Cemetery; Birdsall's grave is in her hometown, Sturgeon Bay.

Years passed.

The restaurant was called the Don Quixote Supper Club in 1974 when Phil Lee and his brother, Peter, purchased it from Eddie Weber. Weber didn't mention its dark past until "after the closing, after the money was exchanged," Lee said. "Then he came in with a couple of (newspaper) clippings."

Lee, who is Chinese and was brought up in the old country, said he had an odd reaction to the news. "We believe in this kind of stuff, the presence of a spirit," he said.

He recalled visiting a sacrificial altar in Mexico once where many lives had been taken and feeling the presence of those who had died.

"I have the same feeling here," Lee said. "It's just a presence. It's nobody specific."

Although he kept those feelings secret for many years, his employees sensed something strange about the restaurant, too. For example, "A bartender claimed a number of strange happenings," Lee said.

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is troubled and will linger. It's not harmful."

Two years ago, Lee held a seance with his staff and a Ouija board. "We had good, positive results," he said. The correct date of the murder came up on the Ouija board, he said.

Now he has hired a psychic, David Ray of Neenah, to help complete the task.

"With a professional, we may solve the murder," Lee said. "We may find out who did it."

Among the guests at the seance will be John Van Veghel, the great-nephew and namesake of the victim.

This will be Lee's last chance to make contact with the spirit on the anniversary date.

The restaurant will be demolished this summer to make way for expansion of Lee's University Square shopping center. The 9,000-square-foot addition will make the center 30,000 square feet total. A new, updated, 3,000-square-foot Lee's Cantonese House will open in the fall behind where the restaurant stands today.

"With the erasing of this building, naturally the spirit will leave it," Lee said. "We want to pacify the spirit."

"There's also the curiosity of who did it," he added. "By solving it, the spirit can rest in peace, too."

If the spirit is contacted and a murderer is named, Lee isn't sure what will happen. Murder is one of the few crimes that has no statute of limitations, said Green Bay Police Capt. Patricia Lawrence.

It's also possible the murderer, like the victims, is dead.